

HALE, SARAH JOSEPH

CONTENDING

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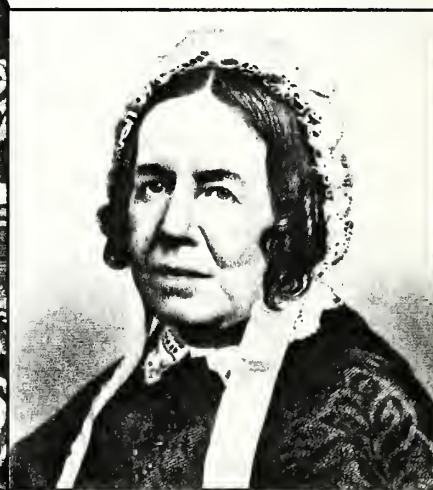
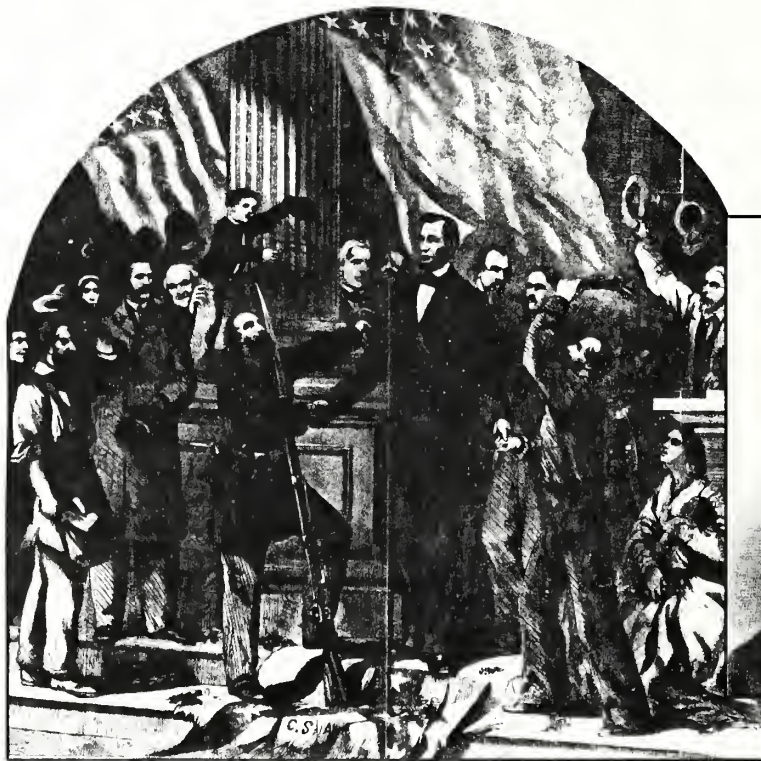
# Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

Sarah Josepha Hale

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

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## Event in History



What do "Mary Had a Little Lamb" and Thanksgiving have in common? Give up? Sarah Josepha Hale—the woman who gave us both of them.

The Pilgrims were supposed to have gone to Virginia, but storms blew them off course. They were not prepared for the cold New England winter, and almost half of them died. Once the *Mayflower* left, they had no way to return to Europe. If their crops did not grow the next summer, the rest of them might die, too.

But their crops *did* grow, and when the harvest was done, Governor William Bradford proclaimed a harvest festival. Today we call that celebration of 1621 the first Thanksgiving, but the first celebration the Pilgrims called a thanksgiving was not until the summer of 1623, after rain saved the colony's crops. And there would be no regular yearly Thanksgiving Day for nearly two hundred fifty years.

In the early 1800s, Sarah Josepha Hale wrote a book of nursery rhymes for her five children, among them "Mary Had a Little Lamb." She published that book and wrote several more. She also became editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, a magazine for women. In 1827, she started writing articles about Thanksgiving in her magazine. She told people all about the Pilgrims and their harvest celebration. She wrote editorials suggesting a national holiday for thirty-six years, but without success.

In 1863, when she wrote yet another editorial recommending a national Thanksgiving Day, she sent a personal letter to Secretary of State William Seward. He liked the idea and showed it to President Abraham Lincoln. President Lincoln liked it, too, and he proclaimed the last Thursday in November Thanksgiving Day, making it a national holiday.

James A. Able, Jr.



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